

Jekyll Island

2004

**Island-wide
Master Plan
Update**

JEKYLL ISLAND AUTHORITY

Updated Jekyll Island Master Plan Recommendations

In late 2003, the Jekyll Island Authority (JIA) retained Robert Charles Lesser & Co., LLC (RCLCo) to conduct an update to the original Jekyll Island Master Plan from June of 1996. As with the original master plan, this update recognizes the key missions of the JIA, which are to be stewards of the land, adhering to the State's 35% maximum development requirement¹ and to provide a Jekyll Island affordable and available to all Georgians. Overlaying this is the recognition that the JIA is a self-sustaining Authority that must operate "in the black".

The following represent the key components of the Master Plan and the consultant recommendations provided by RCLCo to the Authority. It is the Authority's decision whether or not to adhere to these recommendations.

35% Developable / 65% Undevelopable

We believe the restriction of only allowing 35% of the land on Jekyll Island to be developed is integral to the island's ecology, image, performance and market-driven success and recommend that this restriction remain in place. America's coastlines are rapidly disappearing to development and the environmental and ecological attributes of Jekyll Island have been, and will continue to be, one of its greatest attributes. Remaining a good steward to Jekyll's environmental attributes, through both protection and enhancement, should be paramount to the Authority.

Over the past seven years the Jekyll Island Authority has stayed true to the 35%/65% rule while significantly enhancing the island by adding or upgrading numerous amenities and improving the infrastructure of the island. Despite these enhancements, and the strong dedication of the JIA, island visitation numbers continue to struggle and are reflective of other key issues plaguing the island today; namely poor lodging stock, a lack of housing diversity on the island (which can be used for vacationing family lodging purposes), and lack of convention hotel adjacent to the conference center. This stagnant to declining tourism growth at Jekyll has resulted in declining revenues for the JIA in terms of golf rounds, bed taxes collected and several other revenue streams. In the coming five to ten years, given the context of the Authority's mandates and the need to preserve Jekyll's natural amenities, the JIA must identify the means by which revenues can be enhanced within the parameters of the 35/65 rule. RCLCo recommends the Authority pursue options to enhance revenue within the 35% development parameter through a program of primarily redeveloping sites already considered developed² while implementing a plan to assure conservation of the island's natural resources.

¹ See the 1996 Jekyll Island Master Plan for the definition of development and the estimation of the island's size and development status.

² This refers to the cumulative acreage delineated as developed and developable as shown in Exhibit 8 of the 1997 Master Plan.



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Creation of a Development / Revitalization Plan

Rapidly dwindling supplies of developable land in the coastal southeast and the resulting increases in land prices (which almost as a rule necessitates redevelopment as opposed to new development), have placed a premium on an asset Jekyll can provide: ocean-front and ocean-proximate redevelopment and development sites. The redevelopment of these sites can provide both the housing and lodging stock Jekyll needs to appeal to a broader market audience including families, thus enhancing opportunities to increase Jekyll's tourism base.

To tap into this potential increase in tourism, Jekyll must provide greater quality and variety of residential and lodging product, which necessitates redevelopment and development of sites on the island. Several key issues must be addressed prior to this development occurring, including who will be conducting the development, how will the development look and assuring adherence to the 35/65 rule for the island is maintained. While the Jekyll Island Authority is highly capable of running Jekyll Island and providing a quality environment, it is not a development entity and should not attempt to be one. Redevelopment and development opportunities on the island could generate significant long-term revenue for the Authority. To determine the most appropriate means by which these goals can be achieved, we recommend the JIA pursue the creation of a Development Plan for the island.

Prior to initiating the development process, the Authority must implement development standards for the island, including appropriate densities, heights, architectural styles and landscaping standards. Doing so can establish the island as a unique location and destination and help it compete in the market for vacationers and visitors. These guidelines can also emphasize Jekyll's major amenities, including the environment and the Historic District and should be applied to both new construction and redevelopment. Design and landscaping standards can also result in minimizing tree loss and the loss of native vegetation for new development and redevelopment sites.

The second key portion of this Development Plan should focus on the technical aspects of the redevelopment and development process. Issues addressed in this portion of the plan should include identifying an appropriate entity or entities in which to engage development and redevelopment and identifying deal structures that are both attractive to encourage appropriate development on the island while both maximizing potential benefit to the Authority and staying true to the legislative requirements and context of the island. Potential redevelopment and development sites are provided in the accompanying Observations, Recommendations and Guidelines document.



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Conservation Plan

As noted, Jekyll Island's first and foremost amenity is its natural environment and island ecology. To compliment the Development Plan recommended in this master plan update, we recommend the JIA initiate a Conservation Plan for the island soon after the development plan process has begun. This conservation plan should provide an in-depth examination of Jekyll's flora and fauna and identify the critical issues and impacts development and redevelopment of the island can have on the island's ecology. Important examples of these study and management areas are shoreline, wetlands and forest management. This plan should also examine the means by which development and redevelopment can enhance the island's ecology through use of native planting materials, pervious surface and returning natural landscaping previously removed for infrastructure. Finally, this Conservation Plan should provide for means by which island visitors, residents and other interests can further engage the island ecology, reaping its educational and relaxation benefits while limiting impacts. Doing so can further Jekyll's natural image and enhance visitation and revenue potential.

Restructuring Residential Leases

An additional means for the JIA to increase revenue is through increasing residential lease rates. Existing homeowners benefit significantly from the JIA and are paying lease rates to the Authority at a rate well below that which is reasonable in today's coastal market. Related to this is the current sunset provision for JIA leases in 2049. Given the mortgage lenders requirements for federally backed loans, which require the length of the lease to be 10 years longer than the loan, the JIA should pursue an extension of this lease period. Renewal of these leases provides an opportunity for the JIA to restructure these leases and receive a more equitable share of the value provided these homes by both the island itself and the infrastructure and services provided by the JIA. The JIA should continue to work with Congressman Kingston and USFW to make technical corrections to the FEMA maps to ensure that developments on Jekyll can receive federally funded flood insurance.

Given this, a readjustment of JIA residential lease rates should be considered, including the means by which lease rates are determined. We recommend the JIA readjust the lease structure to a value based system creating a fair evaluation for all homeowners based on the current fair market range of 1% to 2% of assessed value. Further, we recommend the JIA collect a transfer fee when leases change ownership, similar to that typical of fee simple properties in the Brunswick area and throughout the U.S. Finally, we recommend the JIA pursue opportunities to participate in use of properties for investment purposes, in particular vacation rentals, in which ownership properties largely function as a lodging business.



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Technical Amendments

In addition to the aforementioned updates to the Jekyll Island Master Plan, one technical amendment to the previous development maps is recommended. The long-term designation of a 3.9-acre parcel of land that lies between the existing 4H Center and the existing residential development on the south side of the island should be changed from undeveloped to a development site on Exhibit 8 in the Master Plan. This parcel was plotted in August 1955 for single-family residential development and while no structure has been built on the property, the land has been disturbed from its natural state and must be reclassified.

More detailed observations, recommendations and guidelines can be found in the accompanying document to this Updated Master Plan and are available through the Jekyll Island Authority.

